DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 197 243 CG 014 890

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TITLE Marital Contracts of One- Versus Two-Career Couples.
PUB DATE Sep 80
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (88th, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, September 1-5, 1980). Best copy available.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment (to Environment); *Employed Women; Family Life; Homemakers; *Home Management; Individual Development; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Married Students; Privacy; Self Actualization; Sex Role; *Spouses
IDENTIFIERS *Dual Career Family

ABSTRACT

One- and two-career married couples, though existing on comparable total family incomes, may be experiencing very different marital situations. The marital agreements of one- and two-career couples were compared to examine the relationship between marital adjustment and the one- versus two-career situation. Married college students and their spouses were divided into the single-career category (24 couples with the wife contributing less than 33% of the total family income) and the two-career category (23 couples with the wife contributing more than 33% of the total family income). Subjects completed the Locke-Wallace Short Marital Adjustment Test and the Marital Contract Assessment Blank. The marriages of the one-career group were more open and growth-oriented than those of the two-career group. Both groups placed equal emphasis on equality and role flexibility; one-career couples incorporated more privacy, openness in companionship, individual identity, and trust in their marital agreements. There was no overall difference between the two groups in terms of marital adjustment. Women from one-career families experienced significantly more marital adjustment than any other subgroup, perhaps because they had more time available for growth concerns and individual activities. (Author/NRB)

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MARITAL CONTRACTS OF ONE-VERSUS TWO-CAREER COUPLES

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Presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, September, 1980.

Marital Contracts of One-Versus Two-Career Couples[1]

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Introduction

The dual-career marriage is becoming more and more prevalent in the United States. This is, at times, occurring out of choice. More and more frequently, however, it seems to be occurring out of necessity. The current estimate is that 20 percent of U.S. couples have wives earning as much or more than their husbands (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1976). The agreements governing such relationships must of necessity differ from those found in more conventional marriages, where the husband is the sole breadwinner and the wife is responsible for the home and children. This study seeks to compare the marital agreements of couples in which the husband generates most of the family income with those who also have the wife contributing a significant portion of that income. These two sets of couples, though existing on comparable total family incomes, must be experiencing very different marital situations, and their marital agreements should reflect these situational differences.

As Gowler and Legge (1978) point out, marital agreements consist of both formal, explicit rules and hidden, implicit ones, and in the dual-career arrangement, the couples examine the implicit rules more carefully than typically occurs in a conventional marriage. The present study is interested in the nature of the differences resulting from such scrutiny.

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[1]Requests for reprints should be sent to the senior author at the Counseling Center, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, UNCC Station, Charlotte, NC 28223.

O'Neill and O'Neill (1972) have suggested that the explicit and implicit rules of a marriage may be viewed as either closed or open. Closed marriages accept the traditional division of labor and reflect the behavioral expectations traditionally found in the Western family system. Open marriages, on the other hand, place greater emphasis on personal growth and seek to eliminate expectations which inhibit personal growth. The O'Neills further suggest that marital agreements may be divided into eight general categories: (1) Living for Now and Realistic Expectations - rules governing the short versus long-range goals of the relationship and individual versus joint responsibility for achieving these goals, (2) Privacy - rules about the availibility and desireability of personal privacy, (3) Open and Honest Communication - rules regarding the amount and nature of interpersonal communication between the spouses; (4) Role Flexibility - rules relating to the assignment of or flexibility in household/work roles; (5) Open Companionship - rules regarding the development of individual, intimate relationshipsoutside the marriage; (6) Equality - rules governing the equity of rights, responsibilities and decision making power; (7) Identity - rules about the importance of individual differences and personal growth; (8) Trust - rules about honesty and the degree to which one's spouse is treated as a possession to be guarded.

Rather than viewing marriages as either dichotomously open or closed, Wachowiak and Bragg (1980) have suggested that an openness continuum can be reliably measured. Further, they have shown that scores resulting from such measurements exhibit construct validity and relate directly to marital adjustment in women.

The present study uses the scale designed by Wachowiak and Bragg to compare the marital agreements of one-career and two-career couples. These

couples will be compared with regard to both the overall openness of the marital relationship and specific differences within each of the eight areas listed above. It is hypothesized that the two-career marriages will be more open than their one-career counterparts. Two careers, it is felt, necessitate adjustments of the traditional marital arrangement in the open direction, particularly in the areas of equality, role flexibility, and identity. That is, two-career couples should exhibit more equity in the sharing of decision-making power, more flexibility in terms of household role ascriptions, and a greater emphasis on the achievement of a personal and distinct identity.

The study also examines the relationship between marital adjustment and the one versus dual-career situation. Knapp and Whitehurst (1978) report that sexually open marriage appears to be particularly attractive and beneficial to women. Moreover, Wachowiak and Bragg (1980) found that marital adjustment increased with the amount of marital openness for women, particularly those with children. However, there was no relationship between marital openness and marital adjustment for men. The dual-career situation, if it, indeed, increases marital openness, should, therefore, also increase marital adjustment among the women. On the other hand, as Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) suggest, two careers produce added strain on the relationship, which would undermine marital adjustment. The present study seeks to address these conflicting predictions.

Method

Subjects

The subjects included in this study were 47 students (graduate and undergraduate) at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and their

spouses. These couples were divided into two groups: one-career and two-career couples. One-career couples were defined as those couples with one spouse, the husband, as the primary source of income. To be included in this group, the wife could be employed outside the home but must generate less than 33% of the total family income. Two-career couples had both spouses employed outside the home with each contributing more than 33% of the total family income. Employing this criterion, 24 couples were placed in the single-career category, and 23 couples were assigned to the two-career group.

Using demographic data obtained from the subjects, the two groups were compared for equivalence on the following variables: age, number of years married, income, number of children, level of education, and frequency of church attendance. The mean age of the one-career group was 35.4 years as opposed to 32.2 years for the two-career group, a difference which approached statistical significance ($t=1.78$, $p < .10$). One-career couples had been married 10.9 years while the two-career marriages had lasted for an average of 7.4 years, a statistically significant difference ($t=2.18$, $p < .05$). One-career couples were composed, on the average, of 1.58 children, while two-career families had a mean of 0.96, a significant difference ($t=2.26$, $p < .05$). The level of education of each group was not significantly different, the one-career couples had a mean of 16.5 years of education, and the two-career couples had a mean of 15.9 years. Church attendance emerged as another variable on which the two groups were not equivalent ($t=2.09$, $p < .05$); one-career couples were found to attend church an average of 1.8 times per month while two-career couples attended 2.5 times each month.

The two groups were statistically different on three variables (number of years married, number of children, church attendance) and approached a

statistically significant difference on the variable of age. Subsequent analyses comparing the two groups used these four variables as covariates in order to partial out their effects.

The two groups were not significantly different in terms of total family income, one-career couples had an average annual income of $22,510 as compared to $25,500 for two-career couples. The couples were surviving on essentially equal total family incomes. The four wives in the one-career group who were employed outside the home contributed an average of $3,275 (14.5%) to the total family earnings; whereas, in the two-career group, the relative contributions of the spouses were more nearly equal (59%, 41%). Thus, the study compares two groups of couples, both subsisting on similar total family incomes, but differing in that, for one group the preponderance of that income is being generated by the husband, while, for the other group, the income distribution is fairly equal.

Procedure

Subjects were administered the Locke-Wallace Short Marital Adjustment Test (Locke and Wallace, 1959) and the Marital Contract Assessment Blank (Wachowiak and Bragg, 1980). The Marital Contract Assessment Blank (MCAB) is composed of 40 forced-choice items which pit an open and a traditional option against each other. With each item, the respondents are instructed to select the alternative which most nearly represents the explicit or implicit rules in their marital relationship. The MCAB was constructed to reflect the eight key areas of marital contracts outlined by O'Neill and O'Neill (1972). These areas are (a sample item from the MCAB follows each in parenthesis): Living for Now and Realistic Expectations ("My spouse and I each accept responsibility for him/herself and grant it to our mate" versus "My spouse and I feel responsible for one another"), Privacy ("My

spouse and I spend most of our free time together" versus "My spouse and I spend much of our free time pursuing our own individual interests"), Open and Honest Communication ("My spouse and I feel free to discuss everything with each other" versus "My spouse and I feel that some things are better not being brought up"), Role Flexibility ("My spouse and I often exchange roles for conveniences' sake" versus "My spouse and I each have our ascribed roles in our marriage"), Open Companionship ("Extra-marital sex could never be tolerated in our marriage" versus "If handled properly extra-marital sex could be tolerated"), Equality ("Each of us has equal amounts of freedom and responsibility within the relationship" versus "One of us has more freedom and/or responsibility within the relationship"), Identity ("My spouse and I are pretty well settled down and individual change is minimal" versus "My spouse and I are still in the midst of important personal changes") and Trust ("When either my spouse or I are away, we are concerned about what the other might do" versus "Neither of us has any qualms about what the other might be doing when he/she is away"). The MCAB has five items devoted to each of these areas, and, therefore yields eight sub-scale scores as well as a total score.

Results

MCAB Total Scores

Each subject received one point for each choice of an "open" alternative on the Marital Contract Assessment Blank. The sum of "open" choices made comprised each subject's MCAB total score. The resulting means and standard deviations for these scores are presented in Table I by Sex and by career status (whether a subject belongs to a one-career or a two-career couple).

Insert Table I about here

Table 1

MCAB and Locke-Wallace Means and Standard Deviation by Career Type by Sex

Scale	One Career						Two Career					
	Males		Females		Total		Males		Females		Total	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
1. Expectations	2.2	1.2	2.2	1.2	2.2	1.3	2.3	1.6	2.0	1.4	2.2	1.5
2. Privacy	2.1	1.3	2.6	1.2	2.4	1.3	1.8	1.2	1.9	1.1	1.9	1.1
3. Communication	2.8	1.1	3.2	1.2	2.9	1.2	2.6	1.2	2.7	1.4	2.7	1.3
4. Role Flexibility	2.6	1.4	2.9	1.4	2.6	1.4	2.7	1.6	2.9	1.7	2.8	1.6
5. Companionship	2.5	1.2	2.8	1.4	2.6	1.3	1.7	1.0	1.9	1.1	1.8	1.1
6. Equality	3.8	0.9	3.8	1.1	3.8	0.9	3.8	1.0	3.9	1.2	3.8	1.1
7. Identity	2.0	1.3	2.6	1.2	2.3	1.3	1.7	1.2	1.9	1.4	1.8	1.3
8. Trust	3.6	1.0	3.6	1.4	3.6	1.3	2.9	1.5	2.4	1.5	2.7	1.5
Total MCAB	21.6	5.2	23.8	5.5	22.4	5.4	19.3	5.0	19.6	5.7	19.5	5.3
Marital Adjustment	103.40	15.5	109.6	17.29	106.9	16.8	105.0	17.4	98.0	22.2	101.5	20.0

MCAB total scores were analyzed by means of a 2x2 analysis of covariance with sex and career status as the independent variables and age, years married, number of children, and church attendance as covariates. The results of this analysis are presented in Table II. Both main effects were significant. Thus, the women had significantly higher (more "open") adjusted mean

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Insert Table II about here

MCAB scores, and contrary to prediction, those belonging to one-career couples gave significantly more "open" responses than those from two-career couples.

MCAB Sub-Scale Scores

As described earlier, the forty items of the MCAB can be divided into eight sub-scales of five items each. Subjects were also given sub-scale scores representing the number of "open" choices they made on each of the eight sub-scales. To more accurately determine the source of the observed marital contract differences among the four groups, 2x2 analyses of covariance were computed on each set of sub-scale scores.

The females had significantly more "open" responses than males on the Identity sub-scale ($F=6.40$, $p < .05$). Male-female differences approached significance on the Privacy sub-scale ($F=3.87$, $p < .10$). An examination of Table I reveals that these differences are due to the discrepancy between the scores of the one-career women and the one-career men, the non-career wives experiencing more privacy and freedom to develop an individual identity than their spouses.

The one-career couples chose significantly more "open" alternatives on four of the eight sub-scales: Privacy ($F=5.21$, $p < .05$), Open Companionship

Table 2

Analysis of Covariance of MCAB

Total Scores

Source of Variance				
Career Status	230.82	1	230.82	10.53**
Sex	112.68	1	112.68	5.12*
Career Status x Sex	20.57	1	20.57	.94
Within	1885.59	86	21.93	

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

(F=5.40, $p < .05$), Identity (F=6.24, $p < .05$), and Trust (F=12.01, p .001). Responses to the individual items within these categories were then analyzed to more specifically understand the marital contract differences among the groups.

MCAB Item Differences

With a number of items, the one-career couples significantly differed from the two-career couples in terms of the frequency of the alternative picked. Within the Privacy sub-scale significantly ($x^2=3.92$, $p < .05$) more two-career individuals picked, "My spouse and I feel that togetherness is more important for our relationship than privacy," rather than "It is important in our marriage that each of us has sufficient time to him/herself." Within the Communication sub-scale, significantly ($x^2=11.82$, $p < .001$) more one-career individuals favored the alternative, "My spouse and I feel free to discuss everything with each other," as opposed to the option, "My spouse and I feel that some things are better off not being brought up." Within Role Flexibility, the one-career subjects preferred the alternative, "household duties are performed mainly by one of us," significantly ($x^2=3.86$, $p < .05$) more often than the two-career subjects. The alternative was, "Household duties are shared equally." The one-career and two-career couples differed significantly in their choices on two Companionship items: The two-career subjects favored the alternative, "Our friendships are typically with 'couples' rather than with individuals whom one of us might like," whereas the one-career people more frequently ($x^2=9.58$, $p < .01$) picked, "Sometimes one of us will like one person in a couple we've met and will pursue that friendship." On another Companionship item, the two-career people picked, "Our outside relationships are, for the most part, social and entertaining," significantly ($x^2=4.00$, $p < .05$) more often than

did the one-career subjects ("My spouse and I each have deep personal relationships with individuals outside of the marriage" was the alternative). The Identity item upon which the groups differed addressed the question of personal growth. The one-career couples favored the alternative, "My spouse and I are still in the midst of important personal changes," while the two-career couples picked, "My spouse and I are pretty well settled down and individual change is minimal" more frequently ($x^2=7.42$, $p < .01$). Finally, with the Trust sub-scale, two items produced response differences which approached significance. "My spouse and I protect one another from those things which would hurt the other, if known" was favored by the two-career subjects while the one-career subjects more frequently ($x^2=3.60$, $p < .10$) favored "My spouse and I have no secrets from one another." Finally, the two-career people more frequently indicated that "Sometimes my spouse and I cannot accept the other's behavior," while the one-career subjects favored "My spouse and I are very accepting of what the other does and says," ($x^2=3.48$, $p < .10$).

With several items, the men and women significantly differed in the frequency of the alternative chosen. Within the Expectations sub-scale, the women preferred the alternative, "Marriage provides my spouse and me with personal security," whereas the men opted significantly more often ($x^2=4.35$, $p < .05$) for, "My spouse and I feel secure in our own right and don't look to our marital relationship to provide security." One Privacy item produced male-female differences which approached significance. Women indicated that, "Both my spouse and I get anxious if we're alone for a long time", the men preferred "We both feel quite comfortable being alone for an extended period of time," ($x^2=3.55$, $p < .10$). Within the Communication items,

one item yielded differences approaching significance "My spouse and I believe it is kinder sometimes not to tell the truth" was preferred by the men, "My spouse and I believe in never lying to one another" was preferred by the women ($x^2=2.78$, $p<.10$). With regard to Role Flexibility, the women felt that "My spouse and I often exchange roles for convenience's sake" more frequently ($x^2=4.88$, $p<.05$) than the men (the alternative was "My spouse and I have our ascribed roles in our marriage"). As regards the Companionship sub-scale, the men favored "If one of us were involved with someone else sexually, he/she should keep it to him/herself," while the women more frequently ($x^2=2.75$, $p<.10$) chose "We should be honest with one another about any outside sexual relationships." Within the Identity sub-scale, the men more often ($x^2=2.75$, $p<.10$) opted for "My spouse and I are pretty well 'settled down' and individual change is minimal"; the women preferred "My spouse and I are still in the midst of important personal changes."

Marital Adjustment Scores

Means and standard deviations for Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test Scores are presented by group in Table 1. The results of an analysis of covariance performed on these scores are presented in Table 3. Overall, there was no significant difference in marital adjustment either between the men and the women or between the one-career and two-career couples. However, the Sex x Career Status interaction does approach significance ($F=3.02$, $p<.10$). Comparisons among the sub-groups indicate that this interaction is predominantly attributable to the significant difference in Locke-Wallace scores between the one-career and two-career women ($t=2.03$, $p<.05$). The essentially unemployed women from one-career households reported significantly higher marital adjustment than did the career women.

Table 3

Analysis of Covariance of Locke-Wallace

Marital Adjustment Test Scores

Source of variance	SS	df	MS	F
Career Status	630.87	1	630.87	1.84
Sex	28.53	1	28.53	.08
Career Status x Sex	1038.30	1	1038.30	3.02*
Within	29524.63	86	343.28	

*$p < .10$

Discussion

One Versus Two Careers and Marital Agreements

One purpose of this study was to examine the differences between one-career and two-career couples in terms of the nature of their marital agreements. Contrary to the hypothesis, the one-career couples describe their marriages as more "open" than the two-career couples. The hypothesis originated from the assumption that the two-career situation would necessitate greater equality, greater role flexibility, and a greater sense of personal identity. In fact, in terms of both equality and role flexibility, both sets of couples have essentially equal and relatively high, that is, open, scale scores.

Bird (1979) and Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) suggest that men in two-career couples do not readily assume a larger role in the household tasks. Apparently any discrepancies in equity within this domain are not strong enough to affect the overall feelings of equality and role flexibility among the men and women of both one and two-career couples. It seems that equal rights principles are in effect among the type of couples found in this sample, regardless of the occupational arrangement.

The one-career couples, on the other hand, describe a greater emphasis on attaining personal identity within their marriage, more privacy, more honesty in communication, more freedom to develop individual relationships, and greater trust of spouse than do the two-career couples. In particular, the one-career couples describe themselves more frequently as in the midst of important personal changes. They place greater emphasis on time-to-self as opposed to time together. They feel freer to discuss everything with one another, describe themselves as having no secrets, and as accepting of individual differences. More frequently than with the two-career couples,

they describe their social life as consisting of individual versus couple friendships which are more deeply personal than social and entertaining. In sum, the marital contracts of the one-career couples in this sample can be typified as having greater personal growth, individual freedom, and interpersonal honesty than do the contracts of the two-career couples.

To what can the above conclusion be attributed? The study compared two sets of couples with essentially equal family incomes. With the one-career set, this income is being generated by the efforts of one spouse, with the other, both spouses are seriously involved in the business of generating the family income. This situation certainly affects the time available for growth-oriented activities. One-career couples have the luxury of more time available to undertake independent activities, to develop outside relationships, and to engage in a deeper form of mutual sharing. Attempting to balance the conflicting demands of two-careers, a family, and maintaining a household leaves little time to develop a private life or to process a relationship. Left over time is spent in togetherness activities, including activities which can be done with other couples. Conversations may focus more on who-will-do-what-when rather than more extended forms of intimate, growth-oriented self-disclosure. In the two-career marriage, such growth-oriented activities as reading, hobbies, lessons, classes, or personal growth groups may have to go by the board. It would seem that the dual-worker couples must sacrifice personal growth in favor of couple cohesiveness.

Men Versus Women and Marital Contracts

The women in this study report their marriages as more open than do the men. These male/female differences are focused most specifically in the areas of privacy and personal identity. They are being produced predominantly by the discrepancy in the perceptions of the one-career men and

women. The two-career men and women have similar perceptions as to the emphasis on privacy and personal identity present in their relationships. The one-career women, however, experience significantly more privacy and personal identity than do their husbands or their counterparts in the two-career situation.

It is interesting to note the higher identity scores in spite of the fact that these women have no full-time employment of their own. Perhaps this relates to a phenomenon reported by Papanek (1973): the two-person career. Papanek observes a distinctly American phenomenon, among the professional middle-class, the husband and wife actually share a career. That is, within one career, there are specific roles for both husband and wife, and the position may specify sufficient activities to fill the lives of both individuals. The wife may gain a sense of occupational identity through this shared career.

The career women in this sample, moreover, might be more accurately described as working women. That is, we do not know whether their employment is voluntary or whether the job held is a self-selected position which provides some sense of satisfaction or fulfillment over and above the generation of income. The nature of the employment and the rationale for its choice may determine whether there can be an increased sense of identity in the two-career situation. For women in comparable situations to those found in this sample, that is, well-educated women surviving on a family income in the mid-twenties, those who are unemployed may experience greater opportunity for personal growth and identity.

Marital Adjustment

Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) suggest that dual-career couples suffer from increased strain due to being overloaded with conflicting responsi-

bilities. Bird (1979) found that two-career marriages necessarily involve greater intensity. These phenomena do not apparently affect overall marital adjustment.

On the whole, there is no significant difference between the marital adjustment of the one and two-career couples. Nor is there, overall, a difference between the marital adjustment of the men and women in this study. One group does, however, stand out: the one-career women experience significantly higher marital adjustment. At the socioeconomic level studied, they are apparently the beneficiaries of the one-career arrangement. The unemployed wife experiences more openness, particularly in terms of the opportunity for personal growth, than do the working wives or the men in either situation. They, also, report higher levels of marital adjustment. The relationship observed by Wachowiak and Bragg (1980) between marital openness and marital adjustment in women is also apparent in this study. Interestingly, the greatest sense of openness and concomitant adjustment is found among the "stay-at-home" wives.

The results of this study would suggest that, as more and more wives enter the work force, either out of choice or need, there may be a concomitant reduction in the emphasis on openness in marriage. That is, the marital contracts, particularly those of well-educated, middle-class couples, may reflect a shift away from personal growth concerns toward a re-emphasis on the economic and companionate roles in marriage. Such a shift may particularly affect the marital adjustment of the wives who would otherwise be in a more traditional, one-career structure.

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